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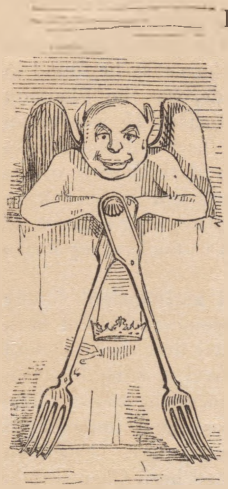
CHAPTER XLVII.

GAUNT HOUSE.



ALL the world knows that Lord Steyne's town palace stands in Gaunt-square, out of which Great Gaunt-street leads, whither we first conducted Rebecca, in the time of the departed Sir Pitt Crawley. Peering over the railings and through the black trees into the garden of the Square, you see a few miserable governesses with wan-faced pupils wandering round and round it, and round the dreary grass-plot in the centre of which rises the statue of Lord Gaunt, who fought at Minden, in a three-tailed wig, and otherwise habited like a Roman Emperor. Gaunt House occupies nearly a side of the Square. The remaining three sides are composed of mansions that have passed away into Dowagerism;—tall, dark houses, with window-frames of stone, or picked out of a lighter red. Little light seems to be behind those lean, comfortless casements now: and hospitality to have passed away from those doors as much as the laced lacqueys and link-boys of old times, who used to put out their torches in the blank iron extinguishers that still flank the lamps over the steps. Brass plates have penetrated into the Square—Doctors, the Diddlesex bank Western Branch—the English and European Reunion, &c.—it has a dreary look—nor is my Lord Steyne's palace less dreary. All I have ever seen of it is the vast wall in front, with the rustic columns at the great gate, through which an old porter peers sometimes with a fat and gloomy red face—and over the wall the garret and bed-room windows, and the chimneys, out of which there seldom comes any smoke now. For the present Lord Steyne lives at Naples, preferring the view of the Bay and Capri and Vesuvius, to the dreary aspect of the wall in Gaunt-square.

A few score of yards down New Gaunt-street, and leading into Gaunt-mews indeed, is a little modest back door, which you would not remark from that of any of the other stables. But many a little close carriage has stopped at that door, as my informant (little Tom Eaves, who knows everything, and who showed me the place) told me. "The Prince and Perdita have been in and out of that door, Sir," he has often told me; "Marianne Clarke has entered it with the Duke of ——. It conducts to

the famous *petits appartements* of Lord Steyne—one, Sir, fitted up all in ivory and white satin, another in ebony and black velvet; there is a little banqueting-room taken from Sallust's house at Pompeii, and painted by Cosway—a little private kitchen, in which every saucepan was silver, and all the spits were gold. It was there that Egalité Orleans roasted partridges on the night when he and the Marquis of Steyne won a hundred thousand from a great personage at Hombre. Half of the money went to the French Revolution, half to purchase Lord Gaunt's Marquisate and Garter —and the remainder—" but it forms no part of our scheme to tell what became of the remainder, for every shilling of which, and a great deal more, little Tom Eaves, who knows everybody's affairs, is ready to account.

Besides his town palace, the Marquis had castles and palaces in various quarters of the three kingdoms, whereof the descriptions may be found in the Road-books—Castle Strongbow, with its woods, on the Shannon shore; Gaunt Castle, in Carmarthenshire, where Richard II. was taken prisoner—Gauntly Hall in Yorkshire, where I have been informed there were two hundred silver teapots for the breakfasts of the guests of the house, with everything to correspond in splendour; and Stillbrook in Hampshire, which was my lord's farm, a humble place of residence, of which we all remember the wonderful furniture which was sold at my lord's demise by a late celebrated auctioneer.

The Marchioness of Steyne was of the renowned and ancient family of the Caerlyons, Marquises of Camelot, who have preserved the old faith ever since the conversion of the venerable Druid, their first ancestor, and whose pedigree goes far beyond the date of the arrival of King Brute in these islands. Pendragon is the title of the eldest son of the house. The sons have been called Arthurs, Uthers, and Caradocs, from immemorial time. Their heads have fallen in many a loyal conspiracy. Elizabeth chopped off the head of the Arthur of her day, who had been Chamberlain to Philip and Mary, and carried letters between the Queen of Scots and her uncles the Guises. A cadet of the house was an officer of the great Duke, and distinguished in the famous Saint Bartholomew conspiracy. During the whole of Mary's confinement, the house of Camelot conspired in her behalf. It was as much injured by its charges in fitting out an armament against the Spaniards, during the time of the Armada, as by the fines and confiscations levied on it by Elizabeth for harbouring of priests, obstinate recusancy, and Popish misdoings. A recreant of James's time was momentarily perverted from his religion by the arguments of that great theologian, and the fortunes of the family somewhat restored by his timely weakness. But the Earl of Camelot, of the reign of Charles, returned to the old creed of his family, and they continued to fight for it, and ruin themselves for it, as long as there was a Stuart left to head or to instigate a rebellion.

Lady Mary Caerlyon was brought up at a Parisian convent, the Dauphiness Marie Antoinette was her godmother. In the pride of her beauty she had been married—sold, it was said—to Lord Gaunt, then at Paris, who won vast sums from the lady's brother at some of Philip of Orleans's banquets. The Earl of Gaunt's famous duel with the Count de la Marche,

of the Grey Musqueteers, was attributed by common report to the pretensions of that officer (who had been a page, and remained a favourite of the Queen) to the hand of the beautiful Lady Mary Caerlyon. She was married to Lord Gaunt while the Count lay ill of his wound, and came to dwell at Gaunt House, and to figure for a short time in the splendid Court of the Prince of Wales. Fox had toasted her. Morris and Sheridan had written songs about her. Malmsbury had made her his best bow; Walpole had pronounced her charming; Devonshire had been almost jealous of her; but she was scared by the wild pleasures and gaieties of the society into which she was flung, and after she had borne a couple of sons, shrank away into a life of devout seclusion. No wonder that my Lord Steyne, who liked pleasure and cheerfulness, was not often seen after their marriage, by the side of this trembling, silent, superstitious, unhappy lady.

The before-mentioned Tom Eaves, (who has no part in this history, except that he knew all the great folks in London, and the stories and mysteries of each family,) had further information regarding my lady Steyne, which may or may not be true. "The humiliations," Tom used to say, "which that woman has been made to undergo, in her own house, have been frightful; Lord Steyne has made her sit down to table with women with whom I would rather die than allow Mrs. Eaves to associate—with Lady Crackenbury, with Mrs. Chippenham, with Madame de la Cruchecassée, the French secretary's wife," (from every one of which ladies Tom Eaves—who would have sacrificed his wife for knowing them—was too glad to get a bow or a dinner), "with the *reigning favourite*, in a word. And do you suppose that that woman, of that family, who are as proud as the Bourbons, and to whom the Steynes are but lackeys, mushrooms of yesterday (for after all, they are *not* of the old Gaunts, but of a minor and doubtful branch of the house); do you suppose, I say," (the reader must bear in mind that it is always Tom Eaves who speaks), "that the Marchioness of Steyne, the haughtiest woman in England, would bend down to her husband so submissively, if there were not some cause? Pooh! I tell you there are *secret reasons*. I tell you, that in the emigration, the Abbé de la Marche who was here and was employed in the Quiberoon business with Puisaye and Tinteniac, was the same Colonel of Mousquetaires Gris with whom Steyne fought in the year '86—that he and the Marchioness met again: that it was after the Reverend Colonel was shot in Brittany, that Lady Steyne took to those extreme practices of devotion which she carries on now: for she is closeted with her director every day—she is at service at Spanish-place, every morning, I've watched her there—that is, I've happened to be passing there—and depend on it there's a mystery in her case. People are not so unhappy unless they have something to repent of," added Tom Eaves with a knowing wag of his head; "and depend on it, that woman would not be so submissive as she is, if the Marquis had not some sword to hold over her."

So, if Mr. Eaves's information be correct, it is very likely that this lady in her high station, had to submit to many a private indignity, and to hide many secret griefs under a calm face. And let us, my brethren, who have not our names in the Red Book, console ourselves by thinking comfortably

how miserable our betters may be, and that Damocles, who sits on satin cushions, and is served on gold plate, has an awful sword hanging over his head in the shape of a bailiff, or an hereditary disease, or a family secret, which peeps out every now and then from the embroidered arras in a ghastly manner, and will be sure to drop one day or the other in the right place.

In comparing, too, the poor man's situation with that of the great, there is (always according to Mr. Eaves) another great source of comfort for the former. You who have little or no patrimony to bequeath or to inherit, may be on good terms with your father or your son, whereas the heir of a great prince, such as my Lord Steyne, must naturally be angry at being kept out of his kingdom, and eye the occupant of it with no very agreeable glances. "Take it as a rule," this sardonic old Eaves would say, "the fathers and elder sons of all great families hate each other. The Crown Prince is always in opposition to the crown or hankering after it. Shakspeare knew the world, my good Sir, and when he describes Prince Hal (from whose family the Gaunts pretend to be descended, though they are no more related to John of Gaunt than you are,) trying on his father's coronet, he gives you a natural description of all heirs-apparent. If you were heir to a dukedom and a thousand pounds a day, do you mean to say you would not wish for possession? Pooh! And it stands to reason that every great man, having experienced this feeling towards his father, must be aware that his son entertains it towards himself; and so they can't but be suspicious and hostile.

"Then again, as to the feeling of elder towards younger sons. My dear Sir, you ought to know that every elder brother looks upon the cadets of the house as his natural enemies who deprive him of so much ready money which ought to be his by right. I have often heard George Mac Turk, Lord Bajazet's eldest son, say that if he had his will, when he came to the title, he would do what the sultans do, and clear the estate by chopping off all his younger brothers' heads at once; and so the case is, more or less, with them all. I tell you they are all Turks in their hearts. Pooh! Sir, they know the world." And here, haply, a great man coming up, Tom Eaves's hat would drop off his head, and he would rush forward with a bow and a grin, which showed that he knew the world too—in the Tomeavesian way, that is. And having laid out every shilling of his fortune on an annuity, Tom could afford to bear no malice to his nephews and nieces, and to have no other feeling with regard to his betters, but a constant and generous desire to dine with them.

Between the Marchioness and the natural and tender regard of mother for children, there was that cruel barrier placed of difference of faith. The very love which she might feel for her sons, only served to render the timid and pious lady more fearful and unhappy. The gulph which separated them was fatal and impassable. She could not stretch her weak arms across it, or draw her children over to that side away from which her belief told her there was no safety. During the youth of his sons, Lord Steyne, who was a good scholar and amateur casuist, had no better sport in the evening after dinner in the country than in setting the boys'

tutor, the Reverend Mr. Trail, (now my Lord Bishop of Ealing,) on her ladyship's director, Father Mole, over their wine, and in putting Oxford

against St. Acheul. He cried "Bravo, Latimer! Well said, Loyola!" alternately; he promised Mole a bishopric if he would come over; and vowed he would use all his influence to get Trail a cardinal's hat if he would secede. Neither divine allowed himself to be conquered; and though the fond mother hoped that her youngest and favourite son would be reconciled to her church—his mother church—a sad and awful disappointment awaited the devout lady—a disappointment which seemed to be a judgment upon her for the sin of her marriage.

My Lord Gaunt married, as every person who frequents the Peerage knows, the Lady Blanche Thistlewood, a daughter of the noble house of Bareacres, before mentioned in this veracious history. A wing of Gaunt House was assigned to this couple; for the head of the family chose to govern it, and while he reigned to reign supreme: his son and heir, however, living little at home, disagreeing with his wife, borrowing upon post-obits such monies as he required beyond the very moderate sums

which his father was disposed to allow him. The marquis knew every shilling of his son's debts. At his lamented demise, he was found himself to be possessor of many of his heir's bonds, purchased for their benefit, and devised by his Lordship to the children of his younger son.

As, to my Lord Gaunt's dismay, and the chuckling delight of his natural enemy and father, the Lady Gaunt had no children—the Lord George Gaunt was desired to return from Vienna, where he was engaged in waltzing and diplomacy, and to contract a matrimonial alliance with the Honourable Joan, only daughter of John Johnes, First Baron Helvellyn, and head of the firm of Jones, Brown, and Robinson, of Threadneedle Street, Bankers; from which union sprang several sons and daughters, whose doings do not appertain to this story.

The marriage at first was a happy and prosperous one. My Lord George Gaunt could not only read, but write pretty correctly. He spoke French with considerable fluency; and was one of the finest waltzers in Europe. With these talents, and his interest at home, there was little doubt that his lordship would rise to the highest dignities in his profession. The lady, his wife, felt that courts were her sphere; and her wealth enabled her to receive splendidly in those continental towns whither her husband's diplomatic duties led him. There was talk of appointing him minister, and bets were laid at the Travellers' that he would be ambassador ere long, when of a sudden, rumours arrived of the secretary's extraordinary behaviour. At a grand diplomatic dinner given by his chief, he had started up, and declared that a *pâté de foie gras* was poisoned. He went to a ball at the hotel of the Bavarian envoy, the Count de Springbock-Hohenlaufen, with his head shaved, and dressed as a Capuchin friar. It was not a masked ball, as some folks wanted to persuade you. It was something queer, people whispered. His grandfather was so. It was in the family.

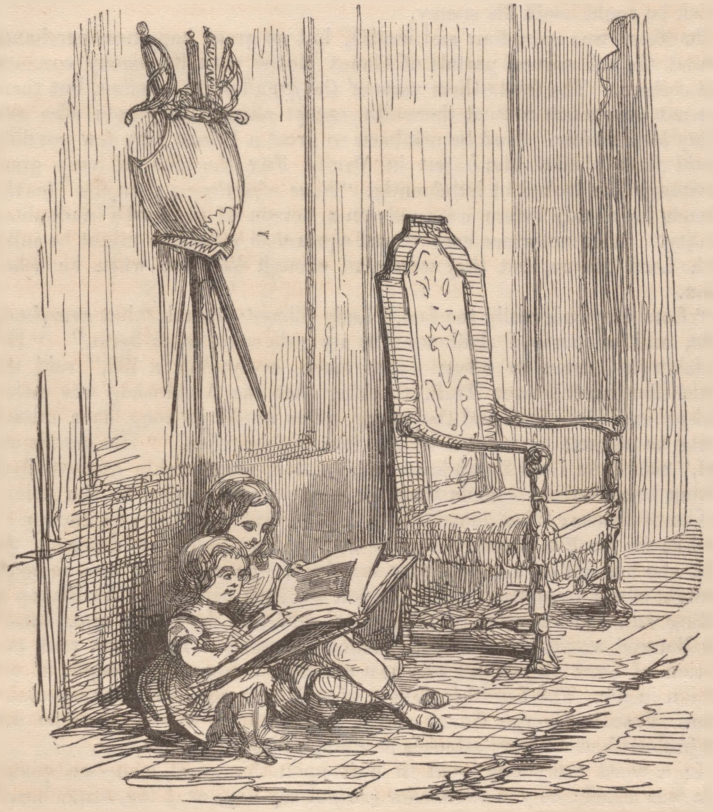
His wife and family returned to this country, and took up their abode at Gaunt House. Lord George gave up his post on the European continent, and was gazetted to Brazil. But people knew better; he never returned from that Brazil expedition—never died there—never lived there—never was there at all. He was nowhere: he was gone out altogether. "Brazil," said one gossip to another, with a grin—"Brazil is St. John's Wood. Rio Janeiro is a cottage surrounded by four walls; and George Gaunt is accredited to a keeper, who has invested him with the order of the Straight Waistcoat." These are the kinds of epitaphs which men pass over one another in Vanity Fair.

Twice or thrice in a week, in the earliest morning, the poor mother went for her sins and saw the poor invalid. Sometimes he laughed at her, (and his laughter was more pitiful than to hear him cry); sometimes she found the brilliant dandy diplomatist of the Congress of Vienna dragging about a child's toy, or nursing the keeper's baby's doll. Sometimes he knew her and Father Mole, her director and companion: oftener he forgot her, as he had done wife, children, love, ambition, vanity. But he remembered his dinner-hour, and used to cry if his wine-and-water was not strong enough.

It was the mysterious taint of the blood: the poor mother had brought it from her own ancient race. The evil had broken out once or twice in

the father's family, long before Lady Steyne's sins had begun, or her fasts and tears and penances had been offered in their expiation. The pride of the race was struck down as the firstborn of Pharaoh. The dark mark of fate and doom was on the threshold,—the tall old threshold surmounted by coronets and carved heraldry.

The absent lord's children meanwhile prattled and grew on quite unconscious that the doom was over them too. First they talked of their



father, and devised plans against his return. Then the name of the living dead man was less frequently in their mouths—then not mentioned at all. But the stricken old grandmother trembled to think that these too were the inheritors of their father's shame as well as of his honours: and watched sickening for the day when the awful ancestral curse should come down on them.

This dark presentiment also haunted Lord Steyne. He tried to lay the horrid bed-side ghost in Red Seas of wine and jollity, and lost sight of it

sometimes in the crowd and rout of his pleasures. But it always came back to him when alone, and seemed to grow more threatening with years. "I have taken your son," it said, "why not you? I may shut you up in a prison some day like your son George. I may tap you on the head to-morrow, and away go pleasure and honours, feasts and beauty, friends, flatterers, French cooks, fine horses and houses—in exchange for a prison, a keeper, and a straw mattrass like George Gaunt's." And then my lord would defy the ghost which threatened him: for he knew of a remedy by which he could baulk his enemy.

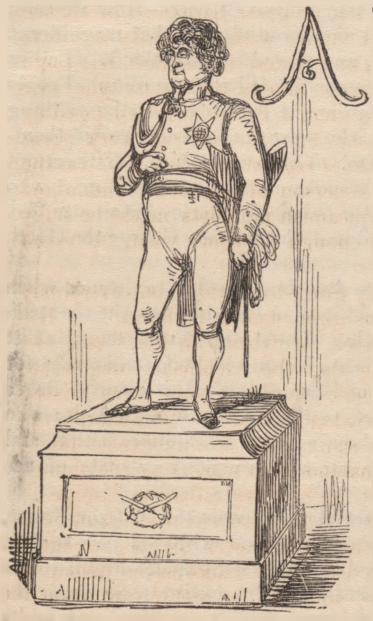
So there was splendour and wealth, but no great happiness perchance behind the tall carved portals of Gaunt House with its smoky coronets and ciphers. The feasts there were of the grandest in London, but there was not over-much content therewith, except among the guests who sate at my lord's table. Had he not been so great a Prince very few possibly would have visited him: but in Vanity Fair the sins of very great personages are looked at indulgently. "*Nous regardons a deux fois*" (as the French lady said) before we condemn a person of my lord's undoubted quality. Some notorious carpers and squeamish moralists might be sulky with Lord Steyne, but they were glad enough to come when he asked them.

"Lord Steyne is really too bad," Lady Slingstone said, "but everybody goes, and of course I shall see that my girls come to no harm." "His lordship is a man to whom I owe much, everything in life," said the Right Reverend Doctor Trail, thinking that the Archbishop was rather shaky; and Mrs. Trail and the young ladies would as soon have missed going to church as to one of his lordship's parties. "His morals are bad," said little Lord Southdown to his sister, who meekly expostulated, having heard terrific legends from her mamma with respect to the doings at Gaunt House; "but hang it, he's got the best dry Sillery in Europe!" And as for Sir Pitt Crawley, Bart.—Sir Pitt that pattern of decorum, Sir Pitt who had led off at missionary meetings,—he never for one moment thought of not going too. "Where you see such persons as the Bishop of Ealing and the Countess of Slingstone, you may be pretty sure, Jane," the Baronet would say, "that *we* cannot be wrong. The great rank and station of Lord Steyne put him in a position to command people in our station in life. The Lord Lieutenant of a County, my dear, is a respectable man. Besides George Gaunt and I were intimate in early life: he was my junior when we were attachés at Pumpernickel together."

In a word everybody went to wait upon this great man—everybody who was asked: as you the reader (do not say nay) or I the writer hereof would go if we had an invitation.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN WHICH THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO THE VERY BEST OF COMPANY.



AT last Becky's kindness and attention to the chief of her husband's family, were destined to meet with an exceeding great reward; a reward which, though certainly somewhat unsubstantial, the little woman coveted with greater eagerness than more positive benefits. If she did not wish to lead a virtuous life, at least she desired to enjoy a character for virtue, and we know that no lady in the genteel world can possess this desideratum, until she has put on a train and feathers, and has been presented to her Sovereign at Court. From that august interview they come out stamped as honest women. The Lord Chamberlain gives them a certificate of virtue. And as dubious goods or letters are passed through an oven at quarantine, sprinkled with aromatic vinegar, and then pronounced clean—many a lady whose reputation would be doubtful otherwise and liable to give infection, passes through the wholesome ordeal of the Royal presence, and issues from it free from all taint.

It might be very well for my Lady Bareacres, my Lady Tufto, Mrs. Bute Crawley in the country, and other ladies who had come into contact with Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, to cry fie at the idea of the odious little adventuress making her curtsey before the Sovereign, and to declare, that if dear good Queen Charlotte had been alive, *she* never would have admitted such an extremely ill-regulated personage into Her chaste drawing-room. But when we consider, that it was the First Gentleman in Europe in whose high presence Mrs. Rawdon passed her examination, and as it were, took her degree in reputation, it surely must be flat disloyalty to doubt any more about her virtue. I, for my part, look back with love and awe to that Great Character in history. Ah, what a high and noble appreciation of Gentlemanhood there must have been in Vanity Fair, when that revered and august being was invested, by the universal acclaim of the refined and educated portion of this empire, with the title of Premier Gentilhomme of

his Kingdom. Do you remember, dear M——, oh friend of my youth, how one blissful night five-and-twenty years since, the Hypocrite being acted, Elliston being manager, Dowton and Liston performers, two boys had leave from their loyal masters to go out from Slaughter House School where they were educated, and to appear on Drury Lane stage, amongst a crowd which assembled there to greet the king. THE KING? There he was. Beef-eaters were before the august box: the Marquis of Steyne (Lord of the Powder Closet,) and other great officers of state were behind the chair on which he sate, *He* sate—florid of face, portly of person, covered with orders, and in a rich curling head of hair—How we sang God save him! How the house rocked and shouted with that magnificent music. How they cheered, and cried, and waved handkerchiefs. Ladies wept: mothers clasped their children: some fainted with emotion. People were suffocated in the pit, shrieks and groans rising up amidst the writhing and shouting mass there of his people who were, and indeed showed themselves almost to be, ready to die for him. Yes, we saw him. Fate cannot deprive us of *that*. Others have seen Napoleon. Some few still exist who have beheld Frederick the Great, Doctor Johnson, Marie Antoinette, &c. —be it our reasonable boast to our children, that we saw George the Good, the Magnificent, the Great.

Well, there came a happy day in Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's existence when this angel was admitted into the paradise of a Court which she coveted: her sister-in-law acting as her god-mother. On the appointed day, Sir Pitt and his lady in their great family carriage (just newly built, and ready for the baronet's assumption of the office of High Sheriff of his county) drove up to the little house in Curzon Street, to the edification of Raggles who was watching from his green-grocer's shop, and saw fine plumes within, and enormous bunches of flowers in the breasts of the new livery-coats of the footmen.

Sir Pitt, in a glittering uniform, descended and went into Curzon Street, his sword between his legs. Little Rawdon stood with his face against the parlour window panes, smiling and nodding with all his might to his aunt in the carriage within; and presently Sir Pitt issued forth from the house again, leading forth a lady with grand feathers, covered in a white shawl, and holding up daintily a train of magnificent brocade. She stepped into the vehicle as if she were a princess and accustomed all her life to go to Court, smiling graciously on the footman at the door, and on Sir Pitt, who followed her into the carriage.

Then Rawdon followed in his old Guards' uniform, which had grown wofully shabby, and was much too tight. He was to have followed the procession, and waited upon his sovereign in a cab; but that his good-natured sister-in-law insisted that they should be a family party. The coach was large, the ladies not very big, they would hold their trains in their laps—finally, the four went fraternally together; and their carriage presently joined the line of loyal equipages which was making its way down Piccadilly and St. James's Street, towards the old brick palace, where the Star of Brunswick was in waiting to receive his nobles and gentlefolks.

Becky felt as if she could bless the people out of the carriage windows, so elated was she in spirit, and so strong a sense had she of the dignified

position which she had at last attained in life. Even our Becky had her weaknesses, and as one often sees how men pride themselves upon excellencies which others are slow to perceive: how, for instance, Comus firmly believes that he is the greatest tragic actor in England; how Brown, the famous novelist, longs to be considered, not a man of genius, but a man of fashion; while Robinson, the great lawyer, does not in the least care about his reputation in Westminster Hall, but believes himself incomparable across country, and at a five-barred gate—so, to be, and to be thought, a respectable woman was Becky's aim in life, and she got up the genteel with amazing assiduity, readiness, and success. We have said, there were times when she believed herself to be a fine lady, and forgot that there was no money in the chest at home—duns round the gate, tradesmen to coax and wheedle—no ground to walk upon, in a word. And as she went to court in the carriage, the family carriage, she adopted a demeanour so grand, self-satisfied, deliberate, and imposing, that it made even Lady Jane laugh. She walked into the royal apartments with a toss of the head which would have befitted an empress, and I have no doubt had she been one, she would have become the character perfectly.

We are authorised to state that Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's *costume de cour* on the occasion of her presentation to the Sovereign was of the most elegant and brilliant description. Some ladies we may have seen, we, who wear stars and cordons, and attend the St. James's assemblies, or we, who, in muddy boots, dawdle up and down Pall Mall, and peep into the coaches as they drive up with the great folks in their feathers—some ladies of fashion, I say, we may have seen, about two o'clock of the forenoon of a levee day, as the laced-jacketed band of the Life Guards are blowing triumphal marches seated on those prancing music-stools, their cream-coloured chargers—who are by no means lovely and enticing objects at that early period of noon. A stout countess of sixty, *décolletée*, painted, wrinkled, with rouge up to her drooping eyelids, and diamonds twinkling in her wig, is a wholesome and edifying, but not a pleasant sight. She has the faded look of a St. James's Street illumination, as it may be seen of an early morning, when half the lamps are out, and the others are blinking wanly, as if they were about to vanish like ghosts before the dawn. Such charms, as those of which we catch glimpses while her ladyship's carriage passes, should appear abroad at night alone. If even Cynthia looks haggard of an afternoon as we may see her sometimes in the present winter season, with Phœbus staring her out of countenance from the opposite side of the heavens, how much more can old Lady Castlemouldy keep her head up when the sun is shining full upon it through the chariot windows, and showing all the chinks and crannies with which time has marked her face? No. Drawing-rooms should be announced for November, or the first foggy day: or the elderly sultanas of our Vanity Fair should drive up in closed litters, descend in a covered way, and make their curtsey to the Sovereign under the protection of lamplight.

Our beloved Rebecca had no need, however, of any such a friendly halo to set off her beauty. Her complexion could bear any sunshine as yet; and her dress, though if you were to see it now, any present lady of Vanity Fair would pronounce it to be the most foolish and preposterous

attire ever worn, was as handsome in her eyes and those of the public, some five-and-twenty years since, as the most brilliant costume of the most famous beauty of the present season. A score of years hence that, too, that milliner's wonder, will have passed into the domain of the absurd, along with all previous vanities. But we are wandering too much. Mrs. Rawdon's dress was pronounced to be charmante on the eventful day of her presentation. Even good little Lady Jane was forced to acknowledge this effect, as she looked at her kinswoman; and owned sorrowfully to herself that she was quite inferior in taste to Mrs. Becky.

She did not know how much care, thought, and genius Mrs. Rawdon had bestowed upon that garment. Rebecca had as good taste as any milliner in Europe, and such a clever way of doing things as Lady Jane little understood. The latter quickly spied out the magnificence of the brocade of Becky's train, and the splendour of the lace on her dress.

The brocade was an old remnant, Becky said; and as for the lace, it was a great bargain. She had had it these hundred years.

"My dear Mrs. Crawley, it must have cost a little fortune," Lady Jane said, looking down at her own lace, which was not nearly so good; and then examining the quality of the ancient brocade, which formed the material of Mrs. Rawdon's court dress, she felt inclined to say that she could not afford such fine clothing, but checked that speech, with an effort, as one uncharitable to her kinswoman.

And yet if Lady Jane had known all, I think even her kindly temper would have failed her. The fact is, when she was putting Sir Pitt's house in order, Mrs. Rawdon had found the lace and the brocade in old wardrobes, the property of the former ladies of the house, and had quietly carried the goods home, and had suited them to her own little person. Briggs saw her take them, asked no questions, told no stories; but I believe quite sympathised with her on this matter, and so would many another honest woman.

And the diamonds—"Where the doose did you get the diamonds, Becky?" said her husband, admiring some jewels which he had never seen before, and which sparkled in her ears and on her neck with brilliance and profusion.

Becky blushed a little, and looked at him hard for a moment. Pitt Crawley blushed a little too, and looked out of window. The fact is, he had given her a very small portion of the brilliants; a pretty diamond clasp, which confined a pearl necklace which she wore; and the Baronet had omitted to mention the circumstance to his lady.

Becky looked at her husband, and then at Sir Pitt, with an air of saucy triumph—as much as to say, "Shall I betray you?"

"Guess!" she said to her husband. "Why, you silly man," she continued, "where do you suppose I got them—all except the little clasp, which a dear friend of mine gave me long ago. I hired them, to be sure. I hired them at Mr. Polonius's, in Coventry-street. You don't suppose that all the diamonds which go to court belong to the owners; like those beautiful stones which Lady Jane has, and which are much handsomer than any which I have, I am certain."

"They are family jewels," said Sir Pitt, again looking uneasy. And

in this family conversation the carriage rolled down the street, until its cargo was finally discharged at the gates of the palace where the Sovereign was sitting in state.

The diamonds, which had created Rawdon's admiration, never went back to Mr. Polonius, of Coventry-street, and that gentleman never applied for their restoration; but they retired into a little private repository, in an old desk, which Amelia Sedley had given her years and years ago, and in which Becky kept a number of useful and, perhaps, valuable things, about which her husband knew nothing. To know nothing, or little, is in the nature of some husbands. To hide, in the nature of how many women? O ladies! how many of you have surreptitious milliners' bills? How many of you have gowns and bracelets, which you daren't show, or which you wear trembling?—trembling, and coaxing with smiles the husband by your side, who does not know the new velvet gown from the old one, or the new bracelet from last year's, or has any notion that the ragged-looking yellow lace scarf cost forty guineas, and that Madame Bobinot is writing dunning letters every week for the money!

Thus Rawdon knew nothing about the brilliant diamond ear-rings, or the superb brilliant ornament which decorated the fair bosom of his lady; but Lord Steyne, who was in his place at court, as Lord of the Powder Closet, and one of the great dignitaries and illustrious defences of the throne of England, and came up with all his stars, garters, collars, and cordons, and paid particular attention to the little woman, knew whence the jewels came, and who paid for them.

As he bowed over her he smiled, and quoted the hackneyed and beautiful lines, from the Rape of the Lock, about Belinda's diamonds, "which Jews might kiss and infidels adore."

"But I hope your lordship is orthodox," said the little lady, with a toss of her head. And many ladies round about whispered and talked, and many gentlemen nodded and whispered, as they saw what marked attention the great nobleman was paying to the little adventuress.

What were the circumstances of the interview between Rebecca Crawley, née Sharp, and her Imperial Master, it does not become such a feeble and inexperienced pen as mine to attempt to relate. The dazzled eyes close before that Magnificent Idea. Loyal respect and decency tell even the imagination not to look too keenly and audaciously about the sacred audience-chamber, but to back away rapidly, silently, and respectfully, making profound bows out of the August Presence.

This may be said, that in all London there was no more loyal heart than Becky's after this interview. The name of her king was always on her lips, and he was proclaimed by her to be the most charming of men. She went to Colnaghi's and ordered the finest portrait of him that art had produced, and credit would supply. She chose that famous one in which the best of monarchs is represented in a frock-coat with a fur collar, and breeches and silk stockings, simpering on a sofa from under his curly brown wig. She had him painted in a brooch and wore it—indeed she amused and somewhat pestered her acquaintance with her perpetual talk about his urbanity and beauty. Who knows? Perhaps the little woman thought she might play the part of a Maintenon or a Pompadour.

But the finest sport of all after her presentation was to hear her talk virtuously. She had a few female acquaintances, not, it must be owned, of the very highest reputation in Vanity Fair. But being made an honest woman of, so to speak, Becky would not consort any longer with these dubious ones, and cut Lady Crackenbury, when the latter nodded to her from her opera-box; and gave Mrs. Washington White the go-by in the Ring. "One must, my dear, show one is somebody;" she said. "One musn't be seen with doubtful people. I pity Lady Crackenbury from my heart; and Mrs. Washington White may be a very good-natured person. *You* may go and dine with them, as you like your rubber. But *I* mustn't, and won't; and you will have the goodness to tell Smith to say I am not at home when either of them calls."

The particulars of Becky's costume were in the newspapers—feathers, lappets, superb diamonds, and all the rest. Mrs. Crackenbury read the paragraph in bitterness of spirit, and discoursed to her followers about the airs which that woman was giving herself. Mrs. Bute Crawley and her young ladies in the country had a copy of the Morning Post from town; and gave a vent to their honest indignation. "If you had been sandy-haired, green-eyed, and a French rope-dancer's daughter," Mrs. Bute said to her eldest girl (who, on the contrary, was a very swarthy, short, and snub-nosed young lady), "you might have had superb diamonds forsooth, and have been presented at court, by your cousin, the Lady Jane. But you 're only a gentlewoman, my poor dear child. You have only some of the best blood in England in your veins, and good principles and piety for your portion. I, myself, the wife of a Baronet's younger brother, too, never thought of such a thing as going to court—nor would other people, if good Queen Charlotte had been alive." In this way the worthy Rectoress consoled herself; and her daughters sighed, and sate over the Peerage all night.

A few days after the famous presentation, another great and exceeding honour was vouchsafed to the virtuous Becky. Lady Steyne's carriage drove up to Mr. Rawdon Crawley's door, and the footman, instead of driving down the front of the house, as by his tremendous knocking he appeared to be inclined to do, relented, and only delivered in a couple of cards, on which were engraven the names of the Marchioness of Steyne and the Countess of Gaunt. If these bits of pasteboard had been beautiful pictures, or had had a hundred yards of Malines lace rolled round them, worth twice the number of guineas, Becky could not have regarded them with more pleasure. You may be sure they occupied a conspicuous place in the china bowl on the drawing-room table, where Becky kept the cards of her visitors. Lord! lord! how poor Mrs. Washington White's card and Lady Crackenbury's card, which our little friend had been glad enough to get a few months back, and of which the silly little creature was rather proud once—Lord! lord! I say, how soon at the appearance of these grand court cards, did those poor little neglected deuces sink down to the bottom of the pack. Steyne! Bareacres, Johnes of Helvellyn! and Caerlyon of Camelot! we may be sure that Becky

and Briggs looked out those august names in the Peerage, and followed the noble races up through all the ramifications of the family tree.

My Lord Steyne coming to call a couple of hours afterwards, and looking about him, and observing everything as was his wont, found his lady's cards already ranged as the trumps of Becky's hand, and grinned, as this old cynic always did at any naïve display of human weakness. Becky came down to him presently: whenever the dear girl expected his lordship, her toilette was prepared, her hair in perfect order, her mouchoirs, aprons, scarfs, little morocco slippers, and other female gimcracks arranged, and she seated in some artless and agreeable posture ready to receive him—whenever she was surprised, of course, she had to fly to her apartment to take a rapid survey of matters in the glass, and to trip down again to wait upon the great peer.

She found him grinning over the bowl. She was discovered, and she blushed a little. "Thank you, Monseigneur," she said. "You see your ladies have been here. How good of you! I couldn't come before—I was in the kitchen making a pudding."

"I know you were, I saw you through the area-railings as I drove up," replied the old gentleman.

"You see everything," she replied.

"A few things, but not that, my pretty lady," he said good-naturedly. "You silly little fibster! I heard you in the room over head, where I have no doubt you were putting a little rouge on; you must give some of yours to my Lady Gaunt, whose complexion is quite preposterous; and I heard the bed-room door open, and then you came down stairs."

"Is it a crime to try and look my best when *you* come here?" anwered Mrs. Rawdon plaintively, and she rubbed her cheek with her handkerchief as if to show there was no rouge at all, only genuine blushes and modesty in her case. About this who can tell? I know there is some rouge that won't come off on a pocket-handkerchief; and some so good that even tears will not disturb it.

"Well," said the old gentleman, twiddling round his wife's card, "you are bent upon becoming a fine lady. You pester my poor old life out to get you into the world. You won't be able to hold your own there, you silly little fool. You 've got no money."

"You will get us a place," interposed Becky, as quick as possible.

"You 've got no money, and you want to compete with those who have. You poor little earthenware pipkin, you want to swim down the stream along with the great copper kettles. All women are alike. Everybody is striving for what is not worth the having! Gad! I dined with the King yesterday and we had neck of mutton and turnips. A dinner of herbs is better than a stalled ox very often. You will go to Gaunt House. You give an old fellow no rest until you get there. It 's not half so nice as here. You 'll be bored there. I am. My wife is as gay as Lady Macbeth, and my daughters as cheerful as Regan and Goneril. I daren't sleep in what they call my bed-room. The bed is like the baldaquin of St. Peter's, and the pictures frighten me. I have a little brass bed in a dressing-room: and a little hair mattrass like an anchorite. I am an anchorite. Ho! ho! You 'll be asked to dinner next week. And *gare*

aux femmes, look out and hold your own! How the women will bully you!" This was a very long speech for a man of few words like my Lord Steyne; nor was it the first which he had uttered for Becky's benefit on that day.

Briggs looked up from the work-table at which she was seated in the farther room, and gave a deep sigh as she heard the great Marquis speak so lightly of her sex.

"If you don't turn off that abominable-sheep dog," said Lord Steyne, with a savage look over his shoulder at her, "I will have her poisoned."

"I always give my dog dinner from my own plate," said Rebecca, laughing mischievously; and having enjoyed for some time the discomfiture of my lord, who hated poor Briggs for interrupting his tête-à-tête with the fair Colonel's wife, Mrs. Rawdon at length had pity upon her admirer, and calling to Briggs, praised the fineness of the weather to her, and bade her to take out the child for a walk.

"I can't send her away," Becky said presently, after a pause, and in a very sad voice. Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke, and she turned away her head.

"You owe her her wages? I suppose," said the Peer.

"Worse than that," said Becky, still casting down her eyes, "I have ruined her."

"Ruined her?—then why don't you turn her out?" the gentleman asked.

"Men do that," Becky answered bitterly. "Women are not so bad as you. Last year when we were reduced to our last guinea, she gave us every thing. She shall never leave me, until we are ruined utterly ourselves, which does not seem far off, or until I can pay her the uttermost farthing."

"—— it, how much is it?" said the Peer with an oath. And Becky, reflecting on the largeness of his means, mentioned not only the sum which she had borrowed from Miss Briggs, but one of nearly double the amount.

This caused the Lord Steyne to break out in another brief and energetic expression of anger, at which Rebecca held down her head the more, and cried bitterly. "I could not help it. It was my only chance. I dare not tell my husband. He would kill me if I told him what I have done. I have kept it a secret from every body but you—and you forced it from me. Ah, what shall I do, Lord Steyne? for I am very, very unhappy!"

Lord Steyne made no reply except by beating the devil's tattoo, and biting his nails. At last he clapt his hat on his head, and flung out of the room. Rebecca did not rise from her attitude of misery until the door slammed upon him, and his carriage whirled away. Then she rose up with the queerest expression of victorious mischief glittering in her green eyes. She burst out laughing once or twice to herself, as she sate at work; and sitting down to the piano, she rattled away a triumphant voluntary on the keys, which made the people pause under her window to listen to her brilliant music.

That night, there came two notes from Gaunt House for the little woman, the one containing a card of invitation from Lord and Lady Steyne to a dinner at Gaunt House next Friday: while the other enclosed a slip of gray paper bearing Lord Steyne's signature and the address of Messrs. Jones, Brown, and Robinson, Lombard Street.

Rawdon heard Becky laughing in the night once or twice. It was only her delight at going to Gaunt House and facing the ladies there, she said, which amused her so. But the truth was, that she was occupied with a great number of other thoughts. Should she pay off old Briggs and give her her congé? Should she astonish Raggles by settling his account? She turned over all these thoughts on her pillow, and on the next day, when Rawdon went out to pay his morning visit to the Club, Mrs. Crawley (in a modest dress with a veil on) whipped off in a hackney-coach to the City: and being landed at Messrs. Jones and Robinson's bank, presented a document there to the authority at the desk, who, in reply, asked her "How she would take it?"

She gently said "she would take a hundred and fifty pounds in small notes and the remainder in one note:" and passing through St. Paul's Church Yard stopped there and bought the handsomest black silk gown for Briggs which money could buy; and which, with a kiss and the kindest speeches, she presented to the simple old spinster.

Then she walked to Mr. Raggles, inquired about his children affectionately, and gave him fifty pounds on account. Then she went to the livery-man from whom she jobbed her carriages and gratified him with a similar sum. "And I hope this will be a lesson to you, Spavin," she said, "and that on the next drawing-room day my brother, Sir Pitt, will not be inconvenienced by being obliged to take four of us in his carriage to wait upon His Majesty, because my *own* carriage is not forthcoming." It appears there had been a difference on the last drawing-room day. Hence the degradation which the Colonel had almost suffered, of being obliged to enter the presence of his Sovereign in a hack cab.

These arrangements concluded, Becky paid a visit up-stairs to the before-mentioned desk, which Amelia Sedley had given her years and years ago, and which contained a number of useful and valuable little things: in which private museum she placed the one note which Messrs. Jones and Robinson's cashier had given her.

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN WHICH WE ENJOY THREE COURSES AND A DESSERT.

HEN the ladies of Gaunt House were at breakfast that morning, Lord Steyne (who took his chocolate in private, and seldom disturbed the females of his household, or saw them except upon public days, or when they crossed each other in the hall, or when from his pit-box at the Opera he surveyed them in their box on the grand tier)—His lordship, we say, appeared among the ladies and the children who were assembled over the tea and toast, and a battle royal ensued apropos of Rebecca.

"My Lady Steyne," he said, "I want to see the list for your dinner on Friday; and I want you, if you please, to write a card for Colonel and Mrs. Crawley."

"Blanche writes them," Lady Steyne said in a flutter. "Lady Gaunt writes them."

"I will not write to that person," Lady Gaunt said, a tall and stately lady, who looked up for an instant and then down again after she had spoken. It was not good to meet Lord Steyne's eyes for those who had offended him.

"Send the children out of the room. Go!" said he, pulling at the bell-rope. The urchins, always frightened before him, retired: their mother would have followed too. "Not you," he said. "You stop."

"My Lady Steyne," he said, "once more will you have the goodness to go to the desk, and write that card for your dinner on Friday?"

"My Lord, I will not be present at it," Lady Gaunt said; "I will go home."

"I wish you would, and stay there. You will find the bailiffs at Bareacres very pleasant company, and I shall be freed from lending money to your relations, and from your own damned tragedy airs. Who are you to give orders here? You have no money. You 've got no brains. You were here to have children, and you have not had any. Gaunt 's tired of

you; and George's wife is the only person in the family who doesn't wish you were dead. Gaunt would marry again if you were."

"I wish I were," her Ladyship answered, with tears and rage in her eyes.

"You, forsooth, must give yourself airs of virtue; while my wife, who is an immaculate saint, as everybody knows, and never did wrong in her life, has no objection to meet my young friend, Mrs. Crawley. My Lady Steyne knows that appearances are sometimes against the best of women; that lies are often told about the most innocent of them. Pray, Madam, shall I tell you some little anecdotes about my Lady Bareacres, your mamma?"

"You may strike me if you like, Sir, or hit any cruel blow," Lady Gaunt said. To see his wife and daughter suffering always put his Lordship into a good humour.

"My sweet Blanche," he said, "I am a gentleman, and never lay my hand upon a woman, save in the way of kindness. I only wish to correct little faults in your character. You women are too proud, and sadly lack humility, as Father Mole, I'm sure, would tell my Lady Steyne if he were here. You mustn't give yourselves airs: you must be meek and humble, my blessings. For all Lady Steyne knows, this calumniated, simple, good-humoured Mrs. Crawley, is quite innocent—even more innocent than herself. Her husband's character is not good, but it is as good as Bareacres', who has played a little and not payed a great deal, who cheated you out of the only legacy you ever had, and left you a pauper on my hands. And Mrs. Crawley is not very well born; but she is not worse than Fanny's illustrious ancestor, the first de la Jones."

"The money which I brought into the family, Sir," Lady George cried out——

"You purchased a contingent reversion with it," the Marquis said, darkly. "If Gaunt dies, your husband may come to his honours; your little boys may inherit them, and who knows what besides? In the meanwhile, ladies, be as proud and virtuous as you like abroad, but don't give *me* any airs. As for Mrs. Crawley's character, I shan't demean myself, or that most spotless and perfectly irreproachable lady, by even hinting that it requires a defence. You will be pleased to receive her with the utmost cordiality, as you will receive all persons whom I present in this house. This house?" He broke out with a laugh. "Who is the master of it? and what is it? This Temple of Virtue belongs to me. And if I invite all Newgate or all Bedlam here, by —— they shall be welcome."

After this vigorous allocution, to one of which sort Lord Steyne treated his "Hareem," whenever symptoms of insubordination appeared in his household, the crest-fallen women had nothing for it but to obey. Lady Gaunt wrote the invitation which his Lordship required, and she and her mother-in-law drove in person, and with bitter and humiliated hearts, to leave the cards on Mrs. Rawdon, the reception of which caused that innocent woman so much pleasure.

There were families in London who would have sacrificed a year's income to receive such an honour at the hands of those great ladies.

Mrs. Frederick Bullock, for instance, would have gone on her knees from Mayfair to Lombard Street, if Lady Steyne and Lady Gaunt had been waiting in the City to raise her up, and say, "Come to us next Friday," —not to one of the great crushes, and grand balls of Gaunt House, whither everybody went, but to the sacred, unapproachable, mysterious, delicious entertainments, to be admitted to one of which was a privilege, and an honour, and a blessing indeed.

Severe, spotless, and beautiful, Lady Gaunt held the very highest rank in Vanity Fair. The distinguished courtesy with which Lord Steyne treated her, charmed everybody who witnessed his behaviour, caused the severest critics to admit how perfect a gentleman he was, and to own that his Lordship's heart at least was in the right place.

The Ladies of Gaunt House called Lady Bareacres into their aid, in order to repulse the common enemy. One of Lady Gaunt's carriages went to Hill Street for her Ladyship's mother, all whose equipages were in the hands of the bailiffs, whose very jewels and wardrobe, it was said, had been seized by those inexorable Israelites. Bareacres Castle was theirs, too, with all its costly pictures, furniture, and articles of vertù—the magnificent Vandykes; the noble Reynolds' pictures; the Lawrence portraits, tawdry and beautiful, and, thirty years ago, deemed as precious as works of real genius; the matchless Dancing Nymph of Canova, for which Lady Bareacres had sate in her youth—Lady Bareacres splendid then, and radiant in wealth, rank, and beauty—a toothless, bald, old woman now—a mere rag of a former robe of state. Her Lord, painted at the same time by Lawrence, as waving his sabre in front of Bareacres Castle, and clothed in his uniform of Colonel of the Thistlewood Yeomanry, was a withered, old, lean man in a great coat and a Brutus wig: slinking about Gray's Inn of mornings chiefly, and dining alone at clubs. He did not like to dine with Steyne now. They had run races of pleasure together in youth when Bareacres was the winner. But Steyne had more bottom than he, and had lasted him out. The Marquis was ten times a greater man now than the young Lord Gaunt of '85; and Bareacres nowhere in the race—old, beaten, bankrupt, and broken down. He had borrowed too much money of Steyne to find it pleasant to meet his old comrade often. The latter, whenever he wished to be merry, used jeeringly to ask Lady Gaunt, why her father had not come to see her? "He has not been here for four months," Lord Steyne would say. "I can always tell by my cheque-book afterwards, when I get a visit from Bareacres. What a comfort it is, my Ladies, I bank with one of my sons' fathers-in-law, and the other banks with me!"

Of the other illustrious persons whom Becky had the honour to encounter on this her first presentation to the grand world, it does not become the present historian to say much. There was his Excellency the Prince of Peterwaradin, with his Princess; a nobleman tightly girthed, with a large military chest, on which the *plaque* of his order shone magnificently, and wearing the red collar of the Golden Fleece round his neck. He was the owner of countless flocks. "Look at his face. I think he must be descended from a sheep," Becky whispered to Lord Steyne.

Indeed, his Excellency's countenance, long, solemn, and white, with the ornament round his neck, bore some resemblance to that of a venerable bell-wether.

There was Mr. John Paul Jefferson Jones, titularly attached to the American Embassy, and correspondent of the New York Demagogue; who, by way of making himself agreeable to the company, asked Lady Steyne, during a pause in the conversation at dinner, how his dear friend, George Gaunt, liked the Brazils?—He and George had been most intimate at Naples, and had gone up Vesuvius together. Mr. Jones wrote a full and particular account of the dinner, which appeared duly in the Demagogue. He mentioned the names and titles of all the guests, giving biographical sketches of the principal people. He described the persons of the ladies with great eloquence; the service of the table: the size and costume of the servants: enumerated the dishes and wines served: the ornaments of the side-board, and the probable value of the plate. Such a dinner he calculated could not be dished up under fifteen or eighteen dollars per head. And he was in the habit, until very lately, of sending over *protégés*, with letters of recommendation to the present Marquis of Steyne, encouraged to do so by the intimate terms on which he had lived with his dear friend, the late lord. He was most indignant that a young and insignificant aristocrat, the Earl of Southdown, should have taken the *pas* of him in their procession to the dining room. "Just as I was stepping up to offer my hand to a very pleasing and witty fashionable, the brilliant and exclusive Mrs. Rawdon Crawley"—he wrote—"the young patrician interposed between me and the lady, and whisked my Helen off without a word of apology. I was fain to bring up the rear with the Colonel, the lady's husband, a stout red-faced warrior who distinguished himself at Waterloo, where he had better luck than befel some of his brother redcoats at New Orleans."

The Colonel's countenance on coming into this polite society wore as many blushes as the face of a boy of sixteen assumes when he is confronted with his sister's schoolfellows. It has been told before that honest Rawdon had not been much used at any period of his life to ladies' company. With the men at the Club or the Mess-room, he was well enough; and could ride, bet, smoke, or play at billiards with the boldest of them. He had had his time for female friendships too: but that was twenty years ago, and the ladies were of the rank of those with whom Young Marlow in the comedy is represented as having been familiar before he became abashed in the presence of Miss Hardcastle. The times are such that one scarcely dares to allude to that kind of company which thousands of our young men in Vanity Fair are frequenting every day, which nightly fills casinos and dancing-rooms, which is known to exist as well as the Ring in Hyde Park or the Congregation at St. James's—but which the most squeamish if not the most moral of societies is determined to ignore. In a word, although Colonel Crawley was now five-and-forty years of age, it had not been his lot in life to meet with a half dozen good women, besides his paragon of a wife. All except her and his kind sister Lady Jane, whose gentle nature had tamed and won him, scared the

worthy Colonel: and on occasion of his first dinner at Gaunt House he was not heard to make a single remark except to state that the weather was very hot. Indeed Becky would have left him at home, but that virtue ordained that her husband should be by her side to protect the timid and fluttering little creature on her first appearance in polite society.

On her first appearance Lord Steyne stepped forward, taking her hand, and greeting her with great courtesy, and presenting her to Lady Steyne and their ladyships, her daughters. Their ladyships made three stately curtsies, and the elder lady to be sure gave her hand to the new comer, but it was as cold and lifeless as marble.

Becky took it, however, with grateful humility; and performing a reverence which would have done credit to the best dancing master, put herself at Lady Steyne's feet, as it were, by saying that his Lordship had been her father's earliest friend and patron, and that she, Becky, had learned to honour and respect the Steyne family from the days of her childhood. The fact is, that Lord Steyne had once purchased a couple of pictures of the late Sharp, and the affectionate orphan could never forget her gratitude for that favour.

The Lady Bareacres then came under Becky's cognizance—to whom the Colonel's lady made also a most respectful obeisance: it was returned with severe dignity by the exalted person in question.

"I had the pleasure of making your Ladyship's acquaintance at Brussels, ten years ago," Becky said, in the most winning manner. "I had the good fortune to meet Lady Bareacres, at the Duchess of Richmond's ball, the night before the battle of Waterloo. And I recollect your Ladyship, and my Lady Blanche, your daughter, sitting in the carriage in the porte-cochère at the Inn, waiting for horses. I hope your Ladyship's diamonds are safe."

Everybody's eyes looked into their neighbour's. The famous diamonds had undergone a famous seizure, it appears, about which Becky, of course, knew nothing. Rawdon Crawley retreated with Lord Southdown into a window, where the latter was heard to laugh immoderately, as Rawdon told him the story of Lady Bareacres wanting horses, and 'knuckling down by Jove,' to Mrs. Crawley. "I think I needn't be afraid of *that* woman," Becky thought. Indeed, Lady Bareacres exchanged terrified and angry looks with her daughter; and retreated to a table, where she began to look at pictures with great energy.

When the Potentate from the Danube made his appearance, the conversation was carried on in the French language, and the Lady Bareacres and the younger ladies found, to their farther mortification, that Mrs. Crawley was much better acquainted with that tongue, and spoke it with a much better accent than they. Becky had met other Hungarian magnates with the army in France, in 1816—17. She asked after her friends with great interest. The foreign personages thought that she was a lady of great distinction; and the Prince and the Princess asked severally of Lord Steyne and the Marchioness, whom they conducted to dinner, who was that petite dame who spoke so well?

Finally, the procession being formed in the order described by the American diplomatist, they marched into the apartment where the banquet

was served: and which, as I have promised the reader he shall enjoy it, he shall have the liberty of ordering himself so as to suit his fancy.

But it was when the ladies were alone that Becky knew the tug of war would come. And then indeed the little woman found herself in such a situation, as made her acknowledge the correctness of Lord Steyne's caution to her to beware of the society of ladies above her own sphere. As they say the persons who hate Irishmen most are Irishmen; so, assuredly, the greatest tyrants over women are women. When poor little Becky, alone with the ladies, went up to the fire-place whither the great ladies had repaired, the great ladies marched away and took possession of a table of drawings. When Becky followed them to the table of drawings, they dropped off one by one to the fire again. She tried to speak to one of the children (of whom she was commonly fond in public places,) but

Master George Gaunt was called away by his mamma; and the stranger was treated with such cruelty finally, that even Lady Steyne herself pitied her, and went up to speak to the friendless little woman.

"Lord Steyne," said her Ladyship, as her wan cheeks glowed with a blush, "says you sing and play very beautifully, Mrs. Crawley—I wish you would do me the kindness to sing to me."

"I will do anything that may give pleasure to my Lord Steyne or to you," said Rebecca, sincerely grateful, and seating herself at the piano, began to sing.

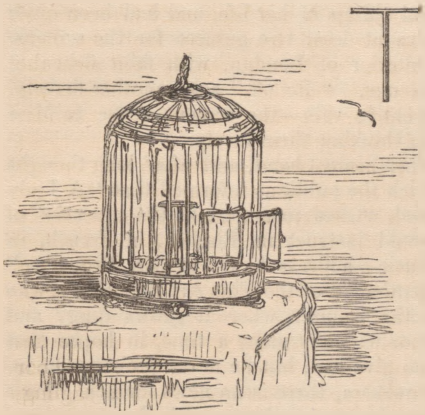
She sang religious songs of Mozart, which had been early favourites of Lady Steyne, and with such sweetness and tenderness that the lady lingering round the piano, sate down by its side, and listened until the tears rolled down her eyes. It is true that the opposition ladies at the other end of the room kept up a loud and ceaseless buzzing and talking: but the Lady Steyne did not hear those rumours. She was a child again —and had wandered back through a forty years' wilderness to her Convent Garden. The chapel organ had pealed the same tones, the organist, the sister whom she loved best of the community, had taught them to her in those early happy days. She was a girl once more, and the brief period of her happiness bloomed out again for an hour—she started when the jarring doors were flung open, and with a loud laugh from Lord Steyne, the men of the party entered full of gaiety.

He saw at a glance what had happened in his absence: and was grateful to his wife for once. He went and spoke to her, and called her by her Christian name, so as again to bring blushes to her pale face—"My wife says you have been singing like an angel," he said to Becky. Now there are angels of two kinds, and both sorts, it is said, are charming in their way.

Whatever the previous portion of the evening had been, the rest of that night was a great triumph for Becky. She sang her very best, and it was so good that every one of the men came and crowded round the piano. The women, her enemies, were left quite alone. And Mr. Paul Jefferson Jones thought he had made a conquest of Lady Gaunt by going up to her Ladyship, and praising her delightful friend's first-rate singing.

CHAPTER L.

CONTAINS A VULGAR INCIDENT.



THE Muse, whoever she be, who presides over this Comic History must now descend from the genteel heights in which she has been soaring, and have the goodness to drop down upon the lowly roof of John Sedley at Brompton, and describe what events are taking place there. Here too, in this humble tenement, live care, and distrust, and dismay. Mrs. Clapp in the kitchen is grumbling in secret to her husband about the rent, and urging the good fellow to rebel against his old friend and patron and his present lodger. Mrs. Sedley has ceased to visit her landlady in the lower regions now, and indeed is in a position to patronise Mrs. Clapp no longer. How can one be condescending to a lady to whom one owes a matter of forty pound, and who is perpetually throwing out hints for the money? The Irish maidservant has not altered in the least in her kind and respectful behaviour; but Mrs. Sedley fancies that she is growing insolent and ungrateful, and, as the guilty thief who fears each bush an officer, sees threatening innuendoes and hints of capture in all the girl's speeches and answers. Miss Clapp, grown quite a young woman now, is declared by the soured old lady to be an unbearable and impudent little minx. Why Amelia can be so fond of her, or have her in her room so much, or walk out with her so constantly, Mrs. Sedley cannot conceive. The bitterness of poverty has poisoned the life of the once cheerful and kindly woman. She is thankless for Amelia's constant and gentle bearing towards her; carps at her for her efforts at kindness or service; rails at her for her silly pride in her child, and her neglect of her parents. Georgy's house is not a very lively one since uncle Jos's annuity has been withdrawn, and the little family are almost upon famine diet.

Amelia thinks, and thinks, and racks her brain, to find some means of increasing the small pittance upon which the household is starving. Can she give lessons in anything? paint card-racks? do fine work? She finds that women are working hard, and better than she can, for twopence a-day. She buys a couple of begilt Bristol boards at the Fancy Stationer's,

and paints her very best upon them—a shepherd with a red waistcoat on one, and a pink face smiling in the midst of a pencil landscape—a shepherdess on the other, crossing a little bridge, with a little dog, nicely shaded. The man of the Fancy Repository and Brompton Emporium of Fine Arts, (of whom she bought the screens, vainly hoping that he would re-purchase them when ornamented by her hand), can hardly hide the sneer with which he examines these feeble works of art. He looks askance at the lady who waits in the shop, and ties up the cards again in their envelope of whitey-brown paper, and hands them to the poor widow and Miss Clapp, who had never seen such beautiful things in her life, and had been quite confident that the man must give at least two guineas for the screens. They try at other shops in the interior of London, with faint sickening hopes. "Dont want 'em," says one. "Be off," says another fiercely. Three and sixpence have been spent in vain—the screens retire to Miss Clapp's bed-room, who persists in thinking them lovely.

She writes out a little card in her neatest hand, and after long thought and labour of composition; in which the public is informed that "A Lady who has some time at her disposal, wishes to undertake the education of some little girls, whom she would instruct in English, in French, in Geography, in History, and in Music—address A. O., at Mr. Brown's;" and she confides the card to the gentleman of the Fine Art Repository, who consents to allow it to lie upon the counter, where it grows dingy and flyblown. Amelia passes the door wistfully many a time, in hopes that Mr. Brown will have some news to give her; but he never beckons her in. When she goes to make little purchases, there is no news for her. Poor simple lady, tender and weak—how are you to battle with the struggling, violent world?

She grows daily more care-worn and sad: fixing upon her child alarmed eyes, whereof the little boy cannot interpret the expression. She starts up of a night and peeps into his room stealthily, to see that he is sleeping and not stolen away. She sleeps but little now. A constant thought and terror is haunting her. How she weeps and prays in the long silent nights, —how she tries to hide from herself the thought which will return to her, that she ought to part with the boy,—that she is the only barrier between him and prosperity. She can't, she can't! Not now, at least. Some other day. Oh! it is too hard to think of and to bear.

A thought comes over her which makes her blush and turn from herself, —her parents might keep the annuity—the curate would marry her and give a home to her and the boy. But George's picture and dearest memory are there to rebuke her. Shame and love say no to the sacrifice. She shrinks from it as from something unholy; and such thoughts never found a resting-place in that pure and gentle bosom.

The combat, which we describe in a sentence or two, lasted for many weeks in poor Amelia's heart: during which, she had no confidante: indeed, she could have none: as she would not allow to herself the possibility of yielding: though she was giving way daily before the enemy with whom she had to battle. One truth after another was marshalling itself silently against her, and keeping its ground. Poverty and misery for all, want and degradation for her parents, injustice to the boy—one by one the outworks

of the little citadel were taken, in which the poor soul passionately guarded her only love and treasure.

At the beginning of the struggle, she had written off a letter of tender supplication to her brother at Calcutta, imploring him not to withdraw the support which he had granted to their parents, and painting in terms of artless pathos their lonely and hapless condition. She did not know the truth of the matter. The payment of Jos's annuity was still regular: but it was a money-lender in the city who was receiving it: old Sedley had sold it for a sum of money wherewith to prosecute his bootless schemes. Emmy was calculating eagerly the time that would elapse before the letter would arrive and be answered. She had written down the date in her pocket-book of the day when she dispatched it. To her son's guardian, the good Major at Madras, she had not communicated any of her griefs and perplexities. She had not written to him since she wrote to congratulate him on his approaching marriage. She thought with sickening despondency, that that friend,—the only one, the one who had felt such a regard for her,—was fallen away.

One day, when things had come to a very bad pass—when the creditors were pressing, the mother in hysteric grief, the father in more than usual gloom, the inmates of the family avoiding each other, each secretly oppressed with his private unhappiness and notion of wrong—the father and daughter happened to be left alone together; and Amelia thought to comfort her father, by telling him what she had done. She had written to Joseph—an answer must come in three or four months. He was always generous, though careless. He could not refuse, when he knew how straitened the circumstances of his parents.

Then the poor old gentleman revealed the whole truth to her—that his son was still paying the annuity, which his own imprudence had flung away. He had not dared to tell it sooner. He thought Amelia's ghastly and terrified look, when, with a trembling, miserable voice he made the confession, conveyed reproaches to him for his concealment. "Ah!" said he, with quivering lips and turning away, "you despise your old father now."

"O Papa! it is not that," Amelia cried out, falling on his neck, and kissing him many times. "You are always good and kind. You did it for the best. It is not for the money—it is—O my God! my God! have mercy upon me, and give me strength to bear this trial;" and she kissed him again wildly, and went away.

Still the father did not know what that explanation meant, and the burst of anguish with which the poor girl left him. It was that she was conquered. The sentence was passed. The child must go from her—to others—to forget her. Her heart and her treasure—her joy, hope, love, worship—her God, almost! She must give him up; and then—and then she would go to George; and they would watch over the child, and wait for him until he came to them in Heaven.

She put on her bonnet, scarcely knowing what she did, and went out to walk in the lanes by which George used to come back from school, and where she was in the habit of going on his return to meet the boy. It was May, a half holiday. The leaves were all coming out, the weather

was brilliant: the boy came running to her, flushed with health, singing, his bundle of school-books hanging by a thong. There he was. Both her arms were round him. No, it was impossible. They could not be going to part. "What is the matter, mother?" said he; "you look very pale."

"Nothing, my child," she said, and stooped down and kissed him.

That night Amelia made the boy read the story of Samuel to her, and how Hannah, his mother, having weaned him, brought him to Eli the High Priest to minister before the Lord. And he read the song of gratitude which Hannah sang: and which says, Who it is who maketh poor and maketh rich, and bringeth low and exalteth—how the poor shall be raised up out of the dust, and how, in his own might, no man shall be strong. Then he read how Samuel's mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year when she came up to offer the yearly sacrifice. And then, in her sweet simple way, George's mother made commentaries to the boy upon this affecting story. How Hannah, though she loved her son so much, yet gave him up because of her vow. And how she must always have thought of him as she sate at home, far away, making the little coat: and Samuel, she was sure, never forgot his mother: and how happy she must have been as the time came (and the years pass away very quick) when she should see her boy, and how good and wise he had grown. This little sermon she spoke with a gentle solemn voice, and dry eyes, until she came to the account of their meeting—then the discourse broke off suddenly, the tender heart overflowed, and taking the boy to her breast, she rocked him in her arms, and wept silently over him in a sainted agony of tears.

Her mind being made up, the widow began to take such measures as seemed right to her for advancing the end which she proposed. One day, Miss Osborne, in Russell Square, (Amelia had not written the name or number of the house for ten years—her youth, her early story came back to her as she wrote the superscription)—one day Miss Osborne got a letter from Amelia, which made her blush very much and look towards her father, sitting glooming in his place at the other end of the table.

In simple terms, Amelia told her the reasons which had induced her to change her mind respecting her boy. Her father had met with fresh misfortunes, which had entirely ruined him. Her own pittance was so small that it would barely enable her to support her parents, and would not suffice to give George the advantages which were his due. Great as her sufferings would be at parting with him, she would, by God's help, endure them for the boy's sake. She knew that those to whom he was going, would do all in their power to make him happy. She described his disposition, such as she fancied it; quick and impatient of control or harshness; easily to be moved by love and kindness. In a postscript, she stipulated that she should have a written agreement, that she should see the child as often as she wished,—she could not part with him under any other terms.

"What? Mrs. Pride has come down, has she?" old Osborne said, when with a tremulous eager voice Miss Osborne read him the letter—"Reg'lar starved out, hey? ha, ha! I knew she would." He tried to keep his

dignity and to read his paper as usual,—but he could not follow it. He chuckled and swore to himself behind the sheet.

At last he flung it down: and scowling at his daughter, as his wont was, went out of the room into his study adjoining, from whence he presently returned with a key. He flung it to Miss Osborne.

"Get the room over mine—his room that was—ready," he said. "Yes, sir," his daughter replied in a tremble. It was George's room. It had not been opened for more than ten years. Some of his clothes, papers, handkerchiefs, whips and caps, fishing-rods and sporting gear, were still there. An army list of 1814, with his name written on the cover; a little dictionary he was wont to use in writing; and the Bible his mother had given him, were on the mantel-piece; with a pair of spurs, and a dried inkstand covered with the dust of ten years. Ah! since that ink was wet, what days and people had passed away! The writing-book still on the table, was blotted with his hand.

Miss Osborne was much affected when she first entered this room with the servants under her. She sank quite pale on the little bed. "This is blessed news, mam—indeed, mam," the housekeeper said; "and the good old times is returning, mam. The dear little feller, to be sure, mam; how happy he will be! But some folks in May Fair, mam, will owe him a grudge, mam;" and she clicked back the bolt which held the window-sash, and let the air into the chamber.

"You had better send that woman some money," Mr. Osborne said, before he went out. "She shan't want for nothing. Send her a hundred pound."

"And I'll go and see her to-morrow?" Miss Osborne asked.

"That 's your look out. She don't come in here, mind. No, by —, not for all the money in London. But she mustn't want now. So look out, and get things right." With which brief speeches Mr. Osborne took leave of his daughter, and went on his accustomed way into the City.

"Here, Papa, is some money," Amelia said that night, kissing the old man, her father, and putting a bill for a hundred pounds into his hands. "And—and, Mamma, don't be harsh with Georgy. He—he is not going to stop with us long." She could say nothing more, and walked away silently to her room. Let us close it upon her prayers and her sorrow. I think we had best speak little about so much love and grief.

Miss Osborne came the next day, according to the promise contained in her note, and saw Amelia. The meeting between them was friendly. A look and a few words from Miss Osborne showed the poor widow, that, with regard to this woman at least, there need be no fear lest she should take the first place in her son's affection. She was cold, sensible, not unkind. The mother had not been so well pleased, perhaps, had the rival been better looking, younger, more affectionate, warmer-hearted. Miss Osborne, on the other hand, thought of old times and memories, and could not but be touched with the poor mother's pitiful situation. She was conquered, and, laying down her arms as it were: she humbly submitted. That day they arranged together the preliminaries of the treaty of capitulation.

George was kept from school the next day, and saw his aunt. Amelia left them alone together, and went to her room. She was trying the

separation :—as that poor gentle Lady Jane Grey felt the edge of the axe that was to come down and sever her slender life. Days were passed in parleys, visits, preparations. The widow broke the matter to Georgy with great caution ; she looked to see him very much affected by the intelligence. He was rather elated than otherwise, and the poor woman turned sadly away. He bragged about the news that day to the boys at school ; told them how he was going to live with his grandpapa, his father's father, not the one who comes here sometimes ; and that he would be very rich, and have a carriage, and a poney, and go to a much finer school, and when he was rich he would buy Leader's pencil-case, and pay the tart woman. The boy was the image of his father, as his fond mother thought.

Indeed I have no heart, on account of our dear Amelia's sake, to go through the story of George's last days at home.

At last the day came, the carriage drove up, the little humble packets containing tokens of love and remembrance were ready and disposed in the hall long since—George was in his new suit, for which the tailor had come previously to measure him. He had sprung up with the sun and put on the new clothes ; his mother hearing him from the room close by, in which she had been lying, in speechless grief and watching. Days before she had been making preparations for the end : purchasing little stores for the boy's use ; marking his books and linen ; talking with him and preparing him for the change—fondly fancying that he needed preparation.

So that he had change, what cared he ? He was longing for it. By a thousand eager declarations as to what he would do, when he went to live with his grandfather, he had shown the poor widow how little the idea of parting had cast him down. " He would come and see his mamma often on the poney," he said : " he would come and fetch her in the carriage ; they would drive in the Park, and she should have everything she wanted." The poor mother was fain to content herself with these selfish demonstrations of attachment, and tried to convince herself how sincerely her son loved her. He must love her. All children were so : a little anxious for novelty, and—no, not selfish, but self-willed. Her child must have his enjoyments and ambition in the world. She herself, by her own selfishness and imprudent love for him, had denied him his just rights and pleasures hitherto.

I know few things more affecting than that timorous debasement and self-humiliation of a woman. How she owns that it is she and not the man who is guilty : how she takes all the faults on her side : how she courts in a manner punishment for the wrongs which she has not committed, and persists in shielding the real culprit ! It is those who injure women who get the most kindness from them—they are born timid and tyrants, and maltreat those who are humblest before them.

So poor Amelia had been getting ready in silent misery for her son's departure, and had passed many and many a long solitary hour in making preparations for the end. George stood by his mother, watching her arrangements without the least concern. Tears had fallen into his boxes ; passages had been scored in his favourite books : old toys, relics, treasures had been hoarded away for him, and packed with strange neatness and care,—and of all these things the boy took no note. The child goes away smiling

as the mother breaks her heart. By heavens it is pitiful, the bootless love of women for children in Vanity Fair.

A few days are past: and the great event of Amelia's life is consummated. No angel has intervened. The child is sacrificed and offered up to fate: and the widow is quite alone.

The boy comes to see her often, to be sure. He rides on a poney with the coachman behind him, to the delight of his old grandfather, Sedley, who walks proudly down the lane by his side. She sees him, but he is not her boy any more. Why, he rides to see the boys at the little school, too, and to show off before them his new wealth and splendour. In two days he has adopted a slight imperious air and patronising manner. He was born to command, his mother thinks, as his father was before him.

It is fine weather now. Of evenings on the days when he does not

come, she takes a long walk into London—yes, as far as Russell-square, and rests on the stone by the railing of the garden opposite Mr. Osborne's

house. It is so pleasant and cool. She can look up and see the drawing-room windows illuminated, and, at about nine o'clock, the chamber in the upper story where Georgy sleeps. She knows—He has told her. She prays there as the light goes out, prays with a humble humble heart, and walks home shrinking and silent. She is very tired when she comes home. Perhaps she will sleep the better for that long weary walk; and she may dream about Georgy.

One Sunday she happened to be walking in Russell-square, at some distance from Mr. Osborne's house (she could see it from a distance though) when all the bells of Sabbath were ringing, and George and his aunt came out to go to church; a little sweep asked for charity, and the footman, who carried the books, tried to drive him away; but Georgy stopped and gave him money. May God's blessing be on the boy! Emmy ran round the square, and coming up to the sweep, gave him her mite too. All the bells of Sabbath were ringing, and she followed them until she came to the Foundling Church, into which she went. There she sat in a place whence she could see the head of the boy under his father's tombstone. Many hundred fresh children's voices rose up there and sang hymns to the Father Beneficent; and little George's soul thrilled with delight at the burst of glorious psalmody. His mother could not see him for awhile, through the mist that dimmed her eyes.

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The principle upon which this Peruke is made is so superior to everything yet produced, that the Manufacturer invites the honour of a visit from the Sceptic and the Connoisseur, that one may be convinced, and the other gratified, by inspecting this and other novel and beautiful specimens of the Perruqueian Art, at the Establishment of the Sole Inventor, F. BROWN, 47, FENCHURCH STREET.

F. BROWN'S INFALLIBLE MODE OF MEASURING THE HEAD.

		Inches.	Eighths.
Round the Head in manner of a fillet, leaving the Ears loose	As dotted 1 to 1.		
From the Forehead over to the poll, as deep each way as required	As dotted 2 to 2.		
From one Temple to the other, across the rise or Crown of the Head to where the Hair grows	As marked 3 to 3.		

THE CHARGE FOR THIS UNIQUE HEAD OF HAIR ONLY £1. 10*s*.

EXTRACT FROM "THE PATENT JOURNAL" OF THE 11TH OF DECEMBER, 1847.

"PATENTS RECENTLY GRANTED.—To WILLIAM DAKIN, of NUMBER "ONE, SAINT PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, 'for Improvements in Clean- "ing and Roasting Coffee, in the Apparatus and Machinery to be used "therein; and also in the Apparatus for making Infusions and Decoctions of "Coffee.'"

PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT.

HER MAJESTY having been graciously pleased to grant Her Royal Letters Patent to

WILLIAM DAKIN,

OF NUMBER ONE, SAINT PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, LONDON,

Under the above title, and for the purposes declared, DAKIN and COMPY. take this early opportunity of informing the Public that the extensive Engines and Machinery for carrying out the Patent are being got ready with every possible despatch; and on completion, the Firm will be in a position to bring this extraordinary and highly-important invention prominently before the Public—an invention remarkable for its efficacy in adopting a simple scientific principle for the production of essential improvements in the preparation of Coffee.